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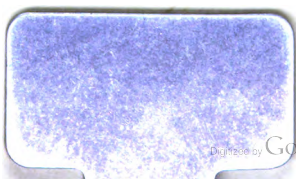
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STRIVING
FOR THE
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STRIVING FOR THE MASTERY.



I.

ELLEN'S TROUBLES.

THE very worst-roofed house in the whole country was the thatcher's own residence. Whilst the neighbours' roofs beneath his hands occasionally put on their new coats of golden yellow, which gradually wore into decent brown, Bryan McGarvey's showed more green velvet than was commonly respectable. Mosses and lichens grew and flourished, and made it truly picturesque in the eyes of passers-by, who might be lovers either of nature or art, although to those who

looked for signs of industry and neatness it was simply disreputable.

The reason was this. Bryan was an excellent workman, and sought after by all the country for miles round. He steadily earned a good week's wages; and as he was a hale, hearty man, who never knew a day's illness, and was able to take his place on the most exposed roof in the coldest weather without getting pain, ache, or soreness, he might have laid by a comfortable sum to support his worthy wife and give his boys and girls a decent start in life. But—

Oh, these "buts," how sad they are! They are like a hidden stumbling-block lying in our path. As we go pleasantly, steadily forward in our cogitations, thinking of what might have been, we suddenly come upon the stern "but" which forces itself upon us with its determined truthfulness, and sends our pleasing imaginations and hopes no one knows where.

But there stood on both the roads leading to the thatcher's—equidistant about seven minutes' walk,—two very comfort-

able well-to-do houses, or, I should say, one on each road. No sign of poverty or lack of industry about them. No slack or idleness in the work done there. No holiday was ever sought by the diligent owners, for on Sunday, when other places of business were closed for rest, and on holidays, when most people took their recreation, the heads and assistants of these establishments were working their very hardest; and although closed shutters made an outward profession that a Sabbath was being observed, a chink or a side or back window always let in light enough to show customers, both constant and casual, the way to their mouths.

Nay, I am told that Parliament even had to interfere to prevent these industrious folk from overworking themselves, and made a law which obliged the police to go round and see that they were not slaving at their commercial interests at hours when their health demanded that they should be enjoying comfortable slumber.

The "hand of the diligent" could be seen in every indication about these twin establishments, and amongst other duties which they never neglected was this: to watch every evening as Bryan McGarvey and other sociable neighbours were taking their leisurely way home from work, and ask them in to hear the latest news or take a look at the papers, and then followed a smoke and a gossip, which, with an oft-replenished porter-pot, or glass of something stronger, became so frequent an indulgence, that at length they could not live without it.

Hence the dilapidated look of the only part of Bryan McGarvey's house which his thrifty wife could not put into repair; for she could not abide the scandal of sending for a stranger to do the work her husband could have done, if only he had not wasted his time at the public-house, and then, day after day, returned, light in pocket and heavy in heart, to sit moody and moping until sleep enabled him to cast off the stupor, and go next morning to the well-paid work he was so skilful in doing.

So Ellen worked and worked, and managed to dispense with the sum of money she might have laid by if Bryan could but put on an invisible cap, and give his decoyers the slip as he was coming home every day, or better still, if he could have said a steady "no" to their evil invitations.

She had a little garden where she grew vegetables and kept bees; and several years she rented an orchard and sold the apples—a thing she could not have managed but for a trustworthy old woman, more a friend than servant, who in the apple season took up her abode in a hut in the corner of the orchard, and with "Spry," a shaggy terrier, defended the apple-trees from all assailants. By manifold ways and means, Mrs. McGarvey contrived to keep herself and family from want, and to give her children schooling. But her life of anxiety and hardship told upon her deep-lined countenance, and the neighbours could see she had a sorrow which seldom found an outlet in language. There was, however, a private relief, which Ellen

knew well and often resorted to, when, like Hannah, long long ago, she used to tell her trials with moving lips, but a silent voice, to One who could hear without words, and who, as He listened, sent help.

II.

HER MISDEMEANOUR.

ONE fine morning Mrs. McGarvey set off in her donkey-cart to the market-town, taking as large a load of apples and vegetables as she could accommodate beside herself, in the hope of disposing of them. She had on her dark-blue cloak and her well-worn bonnet—no veil for Ellen McGarvey, or, if she could help it, for any child of hers. She was content to dress warmly and neatly, regardless of fashion and its changes.

She thought a great deal as she jogged along of the changes and chances that had befallen her mortal life—of the bright and happy young days when her life was as clear and free from care as the blue

sky overhead now was of cloud; then of her marriage with the man of her choice, and their prosperous beginning; then of the gradual growth of that evil which began first to turn her husband's heart from her; and then the many sorrows which came fast and thick to burden her life. "Still," thought she, "I am not without comfort, I thank God. There is a Hand that 'holds my helm and guides my ship,' and a Heart that can feel for me, and a Wisdom that can guide me, and a Love that can enrich me in the midst of my poverty;" and so on she continued considering Him in whom to find all that we need—when, all of a sudden, she was overtaken by the sound of wheels, and a loud voice shouting, "Hi up! out of the way there!" and, looking round, she recognised Mr. Melville Hamilton, her husband's landlord, who, with a young gentleman, was going to the nearest railway-station.

"Is that you, Mrs. McGarvey? Ah, yes, by the way (dismounting), those pigs of yours are the greatest nuisance in the

country. I have a great mind to summon you for trespass; they came into my plantation the other day and destroyed my young trees."

"Yes, sir, indeed. I was very sorry to find that the wind blew down the door of the pigsty the night of the storm, and my pigs got out; but it won't happen again."

"If it does 'twill be worse for you. (Aside to his companion): There's no standing these people; they turn their cattle out every night to trespass, and you never can get at the truth. Look here, Mrs. McGarvey, if your husband drank less ale and spent his time mending his pigsty-door and thatching your roof, 'twould do no harm."

He did not look round, but in the moment as they walked away, it could be seen that the language and tone brought tears to the eyes of one who had trouble enough without getting a wound from an unkind tongue. He had touched poor Ellen's sore spot, and exposed her sorrow in the rudest manner and most unfeeling tone.

There are people—not at all unamiable as a rule—who are called “excellent,” and “good-natured,” and valued in their circle of immediate friends, and who yet saunter through the world satisfied as long as all is right with themselves, and having no eyes for the wants and feelings of those whom they meet casually, and no conception of the truth that to each Christian whom God has awakened to a sense of His “love unbounded,” He has given “a fellowship with hearts to keep and cultivate.” If this heaven-born taste were implanted within us, how tender it would make us in our dealings with others. As a gardener who lifts the tender seedling, and holds it delicately, lest a rough handling should break it or bruise it, we should try to “restore” even those whom we blame, “considering ourselves.” But the school of adversity is generally where this accomplishment is acquired, and in this the gentleman who has just whirled out of sight had never been educated.

“Indeed, ’tis true for him,” sighed

Ellen, "too true ; but sure I can't make matters better, except by praying with every wish of my heart that my poor man may be turned from his cruel deadly course. But if he would only say things of that kind to myself and not before the strange gentleman, I wouldn't mind ; and still I oughtn't to care for a trifle like that when I think of the mockings and scourgings of One who never could say He deserved them. Well, I will do as He did, commit myself to Him who judges rightly. He knows if I am to blame, and He can take the yoke off me, or help me to bear it ; and as long as I see His hand it does not feel so hard. It must have made David feel almost friendly to Shimei when he thought 'the Lord hath bidden him curse David ;' not that I think God told Mr. Hamilton to say those harsh things to me, but He let him follow his own inclinations for His own purpose towards me, just as Jesus allowed the devils to enter the herd of swine and destroy them, not to encourage evil, but to make it carry out some pur-

pose which He saw good to effect. I wonder if there's anything in me that I am nourishing and encouraging like a 'herd of many swine,' which is displeasing to God, and which He would like to banish out of my heart, even though I should suffer loss by it? Lord, by Thy Holy Spirit search me and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

So thought Ellen as she drove along in her little rumbling cart. And as she cast these vexations upon the Lord, they grew wonderfully light, and her mind travelled on to her many heavier anxieties, and she committed these also to Him who was able to help her. At length she found that she had really come to her journey's end, and had arrived at the greengrocer's where she always disposed of her commodities.

"You're not a bit too soon, Mrs. McGarvey," said a jovial-looking, red-faced little man, who looked like a walking specimen of one of his own "bloosh apples," as he called them.

"I'm heartily glad I'm welcome, Mr. Brady," answered Ellen; "what'll be the price of the apples to-day?"

"Seven-and-sixpence for yours. The customers are all set upon getting them."

"Well, thank God, I have a fine quantity of them to-day, and the few shillings they bring are much wanting to me."

"How are things going on with you?" asked the fruiterer, as they busily unloaded.

"Very middling, then. Himself is seldom at home till bedtime, any night, and when he comes 'tis no comfort to meet him and speak to him; and then, the children seeing him come in disorderly, and whispering amongst themselves how to get out of his way, for they don't know which of them he'll pitch on first to quarrel with. Oh, the misery drink brings with it!"

"The more's the pity about your husband. I remember Bryan McGarvey since we sat on the same bench at school, and a likelier hardier boy never lived, and fine earnings he would be pocketing now, if it

wasn't for the public-house. Is there any chance at all he'd sign the pledge?"

"I was thinking I'd ask you, Mr. Brady, as you were always a good friend, to talk to him about it, and try if he would listen to you. Many's the day the clergyman spoke to him, but he puts his advice and woman's talk all down together, as a thing he must endure, but he needn't follow."

"Poor fellow! I remember when I was the same myself once; I had no hold over myself; I'd be very weak in my limbs and very strong in my resolution in the morning, and promise myself I'd never again darken the door of the public-house; and in the evening it would be all the same as yesterday. How I ever broke the bands that held me is a problem; but here I am, a sober man this day, which few can say who travelled as far as I did in the road to destruction."

"It gives me some heart to hear you say that, Mr. Brady. Sometimes the devil tempts me to stop praying for poor Bryan, and whispers that I might as well stop the course of the Owanmore, as try to change

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him. The more I pray, the harder he seems, and the more bent on his own devices."

"Whatever you do, Mrs. McGarvey, don't slacken in prayer. 'Twas the grace of God, and under Him the kindness of as good an old friend as ever He sent to bless a ruined outcast, that saved me. Well I remember twenty-six years ago last December, a wet, drizzling day, that no one dared go out unless he couldn't help it, a phaeton stopped here just where your cart is standing, and a lady got out and came inside the shop-door.

" 'Is Mr. Brady at home?' said she.

" 'Yes, my lady,' said I, for I recognised old Lady Denys (Sir Harry was alive then). 'Is it not a dreadful day for your ladyship to come to town?'

" 'I could not but wonder what brought her to my house. It was not likely she would want cabbage or celery, and if she did she would not get out of her carriage to buy it. I had an uneasy feeling, some way, about her coming.'

" 'Robert,' said she, 'it is very serious

business that has brought me here, and I will come into your parlour while we settle it.'

" 'You are welcome, my lady,' said I, my face getting redder, if possible, than usual, as I told her this fib. 'Shall I call my wife?'

" 'No, I want to see you alone. You know, Robert,' she said, as we reached the parlour, 'what a very great interest Sir Harry and I take in you for your good old father and mother's sake, and so I am come to tell you how distressed we are to hear reports of your unsteady conduct.'

" 'They say a deal more than they ought, my lady.'

" 'Very likely,' answered she, 'a story never loses in the carriage; but stripping it of all its embellishments, you cannot deny the facts, and one is that you have yielded to the temptations that beset you here, setting up in business and unaccustomed to a town life, and now I am come to ask you to give them up, to defy them resolutely.'

" I stood speechless. I was angry and

surprised ; angry because some enemy had been vilifying me in the eyes of Sir Harry and Lady Denys ; surprised because she knew what I fancied, from the gradual growth of my intemperate habits, was hardly a fault, and was not noticed by lookers-on.

“ ‘ I sometimes take a drop,’ said I, at last, ‘ but I’m never drunk, and I’m not unsteady, if you compare me with other young men.’

“ ‘ Robert,’ said she, ‘ I am not going to argue with you as to whether you are much or little to blame ; the same evil one who tempts you to sin, will try and make you deny it or explain it away. I have very little time to spare, but you will acknowledge that it was no hasty impulse nor trifling business that has brought me here such a day as this to speak to you. Will you allow my effort to be fruitless ?’

“ ‘ I am heartily thankful to your ladyship,’ said I, ‘ and from this moment I promise you never to——’

“ ‘ Stop !’ said Lady Denys. ‘ Did you ever see a cat worrying a mouse, letting

it run a little, and then bringing it back with a stroke of her paw? Suppose you heard that mouse solemnly promising to walk away from his tormentor at its own discretion, what would you say? Well, you are just in its position: you are sold under the cruel power of one who is strong and armed to destroy you. He can let you reform a little, from time to time, to make you fancy you are an altered man, but he will bring you back again, and every relapse will leave you farther than ever from reformation: it will weaken and dispirit you, and end in despair.'

" 'What can I do then?' asked I. 'Your ladyship condescends to come and advise me, and tell me my wretchedness, and then tell me I can do nothing to help myself. I hope I don't offend, but it would be better to leave me as I am, than to come and expose my misery and leave me in it.'

" 'No, Robert; there is a thing you can do—one way out of Giant Despair's Dungeon. There is a Stronger than the strong man armed—One to whom, if you

give your hand and rest in His, no power on earth can touch your safety. Trust in yourself and your promised amendment, and you will be like the house on the sand; but trust in Him and His strength, and you will find it a 'strong tower,' you can 'run into it and be safe.' I am come to bring you if I can to Him to-day. Will you come?'

"I knew what she meant, and I almost unconsciously knelt down at the little square table.

"I assure you, Mrs. McGarvey, when I saw the old lady—the grandest of the grand—she that had lords and ladies for her brothers and sisters-in-law and nephews and nieces, with her great house and lands, and rooms that a common body like you or me would feel queer in till we were out of them again, just like a hedge-sparrow that got in by accident; when I saw her kneel down at our black hair-seated sofa, with nothing but a bit of tarpaulin between her and the boards, and, above all, when I heard her pray for me just as if she was a sinner the very same as my-

self, and ask the Lord for strength for me to overcome my enemy, and Himself to fight my battles, every bit of strength I ever had went out of me. I shall never forget that day as long as I have my senses."

" 'Now,' said she, 'Robert, we are told to "watch and pray." And we have prayed (and I trust we shall continue to do so) that you should not enter into temptation, but the watching is a thing we must not neglect; it is done by taking every precaution; will you sign the pledge?'

" 'I'm afraid, my lady,' said I, 'twould be very public, and people would be talking.'

" 'I'll manage that for you,' said she. 'Come out to Deny Hill next Sunday, and bring your wife to church. Sir Harry will ask the Rev. Mr. Sleamore to lunch, and he will let you take the pledge afterwards in the library.' I promised—I did it; and, Mrs. McGarvey, a drop of strong drink never moistened my lips from that day to this. 'Twasn't that there was anything in the pledge that saved me, but

the lesson she taught me was learned too well. I saw my own weakness, and the more I fought against temptations (and many a one I have had) the more I saw that in the power of prayer and the clinging to my Saviour my 'great strength lay.' And through the grace and power of His Holy Spirit, I hope to pursue my course."

III.

DELAYS IN TOWN.

As the "vegetable man" (the title he was generally known by) was telling his experiences, Ellen listened with the deepest attention. She was just on the point of saying how thankful she would be if some kind friend were thus sent to rescue and help her poor husband, when the donkey, which had been standing with all the patience of his race—although in reality the story did not take many minutes—made a slight movement in order to investigate a cabbage-leaf which he had

just discovered lying very near him, and in so doing he attracted the attention of the two friends, who turned quickly round, discovering to their astonishment that they were not, as they supposed, alone. Quite close to them, leaning on the cart and drinking in their conversation with all the intelligence of a most inquisitive disposition, stood Nancy Quirk, daughter to the publican who enjoyed the largest share of Bryan McGarvey's patronage.

She was *got up* in her Sunday costume : a magenta petticoat, over which was looped a bright blue "panier" of the material called "coburg," which being none of the finest, was already, after a few wearings, showing the natural results of its doing duty in the bar on the "holy days;" a black velveteen jacket, scarlet and black necktie, a chain of beads, worthy of an Indian squaw; a head loaded with hair, real and artificial, done into a most fashionable mop, and crowned with a perfect castle of grey velvet and lace, with a blue feather, and set off by a pair of massive mock-turquoise earrings, *disfigured* a

figure which might have been called good-looking if only not degraded by such embellishments.

“ Good-morning, Miss Nancy. Can I do anything for you, or is it a seat home with Mrs. McGarvey you’re looking for ? ”

“ No, thank you ; the side car will be here in a minute, I’m waiting for it. But (with a mischievous twinkle), maybe I could take some message home for my neighbour, for I’m likely to see Mr. McGarvey before she does ; if this is the rate she does her business at, I may as well tell him she won’t be home to-night, eh ? ”

And she gave a chuckle which showed how very well satisfied she was with her successful eavesdropping.

“ I have done my chief business,” said Ellen, quietly ; “ but Mr. Brady and I have had a long talk, and one that has done me good ; however, it’s time for me now to be going my way.”

“ Oh ! don’t mind me, Mrs. McGarvey—sorry to disturb you. I am sure none of us can get on without a little gossip,

sometimes; and you don't favour us at home with much of your society, whatever you may do with the folks in town." And Nancy put up her muff—a soiled grebe muff, which looked as if its moulting season were at its height—to hide as gracefully as might be a too-evident smile.

But Ellen was in earnest, and her mind was too full to notice a childish frolic. So concluding her bargain with Mr. Brady, she hastened to lay out the little sum he handed her in household necessities.

We have not time to follow her into all the details of her day's work, although she accomplished them quite as rapidly as I could write them; but we will pick her up again just as we spy her walking fast down an unfrequented street, where all the houses look gloomy, and many are ornamented with embossed cards announcing "Lodgings," which seem to have remained untouched many a day.

Ellen stopped about midway down the street before a very narrow, gaunt-looking house, from which proceeded sounds of a jingling piano. Here she rang the

hall-door bell, apparently somewhat to the performer's disturbance, for the polka stopped in the middle of a bar, and a slipshod step came slowly downstairs and bore the owner to the door.

"Oh! aunt, is it you?" said the tall, sickly-looking girl who opened it.

"How is your mother to day, Jemima?"

"Middling, thank you; come up and see her."

"I have brought some eggs, it is hard to get them new laid at this season, and a few apples, and the next day I hope to have vegetables, too," said Ellen, laying down a good-sized basket, which she produced from under her cloak.

Jemima slowly showed her the way upstairs, and ushered her into their reception room.

In an arm-chair, near the fire, sat a faded woman of fifty or thereabouts, evidently an invalid; but dressed with an attempt at fashion and finery, which was painful to see. She was Bryan McGarvey's sister, Mrs. Stephens, a "leedy," as she said herself, who had seen better days;

for in early days she had eloped with a kind of half-gentleman, who was too grand to engage in any business, too poor to live without some occupation, and too listless to find it. So after many years of genteel poverty, during which he kept up as much as possible the appearance he thought indispensable to a man of "credit and renown," at the expense of comfort, and, alas! too often of honesty, he died,—not full of years, but of debts and embarrassments, leaving a sickly widow, to live and educate her daughter as became a "leedy" on fifty pounds a year.

The one consoling thought which seemed to support Mrs. Stephens in all her affliction and bereavement was the consciousness of the position her husband's family occupied as "steetied gentry," as she called them, from time immemorial, and the unconsciousness (sweet forgetfulness) of her own humble origin, as she tried to impress upon Jemima that the chief object of her life should be to remember she was a "young leedy"—to keep her hands soft, to play polkas, and crimp her hair. And

she succeeded in this, notwithstanding many amiable traits in Jemima's character, which would have appeared if they had been called forth by intercourse with the practical world.

The "drawing-room" door had hardly opened before Ellen perceived that her sister-in-law was entertaining a visitor; for she wore her best mid-day accent, which she generally put on with her best cap and false teeth when the duties of the toilet were fulfilled. Moreover, Ellen became aware, for she knew Mrs. Stephens' little ways, that this was an occasion on which she should sink their mutual relationship, and not betray too close an intimacy. When by themselves no one could be more sisterly than Bryan's sister was, and then she always laid aside her "English," and came out in her own old, homely tones, but now there was anxiety, which could not be concealed, lest her rural relation should offer her a kiss, or some such familiarity. So before she could advance, Mrs. Stephens met her with, "Ah! Mrs. McGarvey, how dy'e

do? My friend, Mr. Harpur—Mrs. Mc Garvey. Mr. Harpur was so kind as to come and see me. He is such a lover of music, he wanted to hear Miss Jemima play. Jemima, my love, play the ‘Night-ingale Polka’ once more for Mr. Harpur.”

So Jemima sat down and delightfully performed the piece which had been interrupted by her aunt’s arrival, while her mother listened in admiring delight, and Mr. Harpur fixed his great grey eyes (which surmounted a regular apron of sandy beard) on her pretty pale face, and with a huge hand, adorned with a huge ring, planted on each knee, seemed to listen with the ear of a musical connoisseur.

“A great treat, indeed! I never heard better in London,” he exclaimed, when the final drum-drum-drum was triumphantly executed. “I *reelly* must be going now, but you’ll allow me to come again and hear Miss Jemima play, Mrs. Stephens?”

“Oh, yes, Mr. Harpur, you are always welcome; it is a pleasure to Jemima to play for any musical friend. I only wish

——(a deep sigh) Ah! it's no use going back to old times, but when I think of what I have been used to, it makes me quite depressed; but reversions, you know ——" here her recollections quite overpowered her; but Ellen thought of the sad struggling life she had had trying to keep up an appearance they could not support, and by every contrivance ingenuity could devise to spin out their yearly pittance, so as to keep her dear Stephens out of gaol. And it occurred to her that any reverses the widow may have had must have been for the better, and could not have been for the worse. Her thoughts, however, were diverted by her sister-in-law's bouncing up (Mr. Harpur had just gone downstairs), and asking in an agonised whisper, "Goodness, gracious! Ellen, is your donkey-cart at the door?" The reception accent was cast off for the moment.

"No, Maria; I wouldn't think of coming here in it. I left it in Bailey's yard."

"Now that's what I call thoughtful. I don't know what I would do if Mr. Harpur

saw you in it. He's a sweet young man, such a thorough gentleman; and he admires Jemima so much. I was afraid he would find out you were her aunt."

"Oh, fie! mamma," said Jemima; "that's uncivil."

"Hold your tongue, miss; as if I don't know what becomes a lady."

"I want to know," said Ellen, "if you will let Jemima come out to us for a week or two? It will give her a colour to get the country air."

"Well, not just at present; I couldn't spare her. You see Mr. Harpur is here now, and next week he is going away. It would never do for her to miss the chance of his being in town. He isn't, you know, quite the alliance I might expect for Jemima, for being only a younger son, he has got an appointment—a—a—mercantile appointment—in fact, he is travelling agent for a soft-goods warehouse; but he's highly connected, and a most cultivated young man, quite one of ourselves. He has a cousin a clergyman, and his mother's half-brother's cousin was a baronet, so I feel

my darling Jemima's accomplishments will not be thrown away."

"Good-bye, Maria."

"Good-bye, Ellen; give my love to Bryan and the children, and thank you for coming, and for your thoughtfulness in not driving in the cart."

Ellen was not long in finding her way to the yard, where her donkey and cart awaited her. The shortest way lay through the hall of the inn to which the yard was attached, and where she was well known. As she passed through the house, and turned down a passage to which the bar formed an angle, she heard loud talking, and a man's voice, which seemed strange and yet somehow familiar, saying—

"I tell you, Bowles, I don't care a brass farthing for the girl, but I'll soon make her care for me. She's a pretty thing to look at, and one must have something to do in a deadly dull place like this. The old mother is a queer 'un. She's in love with me herself, and she thinks I'm in love with Jemimy. She says she knows I'm a 'connyshure' in music, and 'twasn't my

place to contradict her, so I listened to the 'Nightingale Polka' three times over, and that settled the matter for me; I'm as good as accepted. You'll come with me to-morrow, and we'll have rare fun with the old goose."

"Are you going to marry her, Tom?"

"To be sure I am. I needn't see more of them than I like; I can come and go according to my business engagements, and when I'm gone they'll find it precious hard to catch me unless I choose."

This was the substance of Mr. Harpur's speech, but I have related it in much more presentable form than that in which he delivered it. Ellen peeped in, to assure herself that the half-drunken tones were those of her niece's supposed admirer, and there indeed sat Mr. Harpur and his fellow "bagman," drinking whisky with a freedom that showed long familiarity. She was tempted to go on her way. It was no affair of hers. She never liked her sister-in-law; they had nothing in common; she could not abide her nonsensical ideas, and the manner in which she was bringing up

her child. Moreover, the day was now far advanced ; it would be night before she could get home, and her husband would have returned ; and then stole over her mind an uneasy feeling that something unpleasant was hanging over them between him and her ; she would go home. But she had hardly crossed the yard towards her donkey and cart, when the words, " Bear ye one another's burdens," came into her mind, and decided her.

A few minutes' fast walking brought her again to the grim, gloomy house. This time the door was opened by a shagged kitchen drudge, who, to her relief, told her Miss Jemima was out, so she went up straight to the drawing-room. Mrs. Stephens was reading a greasy black novel with loose leaves, and a once bright yellow patch on the cover. The best cap was exchanged for an old black head-dress, with faded ribbon loops showered all over it ; and the genteel accent was also laid aside, as if the bandbox were the safest place for it.

" Maria," said Ellen, " I have no time

to lose. Don't have anything to say to that man."

"What man? and what on *airth* brings you back?"

"That Mr. Harpur. I have seen him just now, and heard his talk. He drinks, Maria; and oh, if you knew the miseries that drink brings to man and wife and children, nothing would tempt you to give your daughter to that man."

"That *gentleman*, Ellen." The accent came back. "You forget who Mr. Harpur is, and that he's related to a bar'net."

"If he were a lord, he's a bad man, and he never will love Jemima, whatever he says. I implore you, Maria, not to let him, or any one belonging to him, be coming about the house. I'm afraid I am speaking more harshly than I ought, but I thought no time should be lost in coming to warn you that you are deceived in this person. If I have hurt you, I beg your pardon indeed."

"So you ought, for you are very rude and indelicate," sobbed Mrs. Stephens; "coming to insult me and mine this way,

and calling our dear Mr. Harpur a 'man' and a 'person,' a gentleman that has a crest on his ring nearly the size of a florin, that was left him by his great-grandfather—oh!—oh!"

Whether it was the ring or the florin that Mr. Harpur enjoyed by the special bequeath of his great-grandfather, Ellen had not time to inquire, so she speedily departed.

Poor Jemima was in sad dismay when she came in and found her "ma" in hysterics, and heard the reason of the commotion. It was some time before she could calm her down. And then they talked the matter over and over, and agreed that it was very officious and interfering of Ellen to put in her word at all, and that her sole motive must have been jealousy at the high match Jemima was going to make, knowing that she never could make ladies of her own girls.

"My dear," added poor exhausted Mrs. Stephens, "we never can expect these lower orders to understand the little 'noicities' of society such as we move in."

And then they rang up Cinderella, and desired her, if that person "*from the country*" called again, to say that Mrs. and Miss Stephens were not at home.

From that time Mr. Harpur, the commercial traveller, was made doubly welcome.

IV.

CONSEQUENCES.

THE wind blew cold in Ellen's face, as she guided her donkey home. Night closed in early, and it was very dark. She had to trust her donkey's instinct to find the road. It was only by looking at the outline against the sky of the trees which surmounted a wall of rock, running along the road at the right hand side, that she could guess her exact whereabouts. At last she judged herself near home, for the donkey took a well-known turning to the right, leading to the flat, open, boggy country, part of which was Mr. Melville Hamilton's estate. As she came to her journey's end a figure came

out from a gateway leading into a field, and said softly, "Mother, is that you?"

"Yes, Corny."

"I'm watching for you these two hours; what keeps you so late?"

"Many a thing delayed me. I'll tell it all by-and-by."

"Mother," and Corny lowered his voice, "don't go inside to-night, I'm in dread of my life my father will kill you; he's there now, and something has angered him entirely; he's as if he was mad talking to himself all the evening, and Nelly is crying till you'd pity her, she's in such a fright; she's up in the loft now putting the children to bed."

"Is your father drunk, Corny?"

"He is and he isn't. He isn't drunker than he was on Monday; but he's often worse with the drink, without being so cross as he is to-night."

Ellen said nothing aloud, but she thought a great deal, and spoke in her heart things which were understood and listened to by the Searcher of hearts.

"Now, Corny," said she, as she stopped

a few paces from the door, "take the donkey and mind these parcels."

"Don't go in, mother, 'tis as much as your life is worth."

"I'm not afraid, my boy. God is able to deliver me, and if not——"

She raised the latch and went in, closing the door gently behind her.

There sat her husband, gazing at the fire, and evidently boiling with suppressed passion. In his right hand he held the stick he usually carried, and with which he occasionally knocked together the sods of turf burning before him. He thus greeted her: "So you're there at last, are you? 'Tis time for you to come back from town."

"I had a good deal to do, Bryan."

"You had so; and you did a good deal more than you need. I'll teach you to carry stories to the town about your husband, blackening his character. If you can't live with me without carrying tales of me all over the country, you may go to your friend Brady, or any one else you like, for all I care."

"I never said anything, Bryan, that I would not like you to hear."

"Why then, I wouldn't like to hear all you said between you, if I'm to believe the talk that's going on this minute over there at Quirk's. 'Tis a nice thing to have you and me, and that canting sneak of a Bob Brady, the laughing-stock of all the boys and girls in the place. What about the old lady that made him go down on his knees, the piping hypocrite? They say you and he are going to convert me between you, but I'll convert you first, so I will. Take that!" and with main force he laid his blackthorn across her shoulders.

Ellen staggered and fell against the wall, but he picked her up, and leading her half-stunned to the door, said, "Walk out now, and never darken this door again till I tell you."

"Oh, Bryan—the children?"

"Leave the children to me. Nancy Quirk will mind them well."

So saying, he slammed the door and turned the key.

Ellen sank down on the outside door-

step, almost unconscious. But in time she began to recover herself, and then, slowly, and with much effort, raising herself, she groped along what was called the "Bog-road." She was soon opposite Quirk's public-house, and there, leaning across the counter, in high laughter and talk, she could see Nancy, still entertaining her customers with an animated description of the vegetable man and his giving up drink, and of Ellen's feelings with regard to her husband. Then shouts of laughter could be heard from the taproom where the little bit of gossip was being discussed, Bryan McGarvey having left it in a rage two hours before.

Ellen had not gone far on the road when she heard Corny's voice calling "Mother!" She waited until he came up.

"Oh, mother, what's the matter? and where are you going?"

"I'm going down to Bet Hanly's."

"Aren't you coming home to-night?"

"No, Corny. I'm not coming home till your father gives me leave."

"Then I'll not go home, mother, I'd

never stay there without you. Come back, mother darling."

"Hush, Corny. Look here, my son, you and Nelly are the only comfort left me now in the world, and if you are good and obedient, and love God and your mother, I'll never be without comfort; but don't make my miseries tenfold by saying and doing what is wrong. Go home, Corny, and do what you can to help Nelly to mind the house and children. She will have a hard struggle, but it won't be worse than if I was dead, and thanks be to God my life is spared. Knock at the door there, Corny, for I feel weak."

Bet Hanly was the good old woman who always minded the orchard for Ellen. She had a wee cabin at the cross-road, which ran almost through the bog. All the angles formed ponds of water, and on the edge of one of these stood Bet's cottage. It was a tiny place, as neat and clean as could be; it held a stool for herself and a chair for a visitor (for Bet was hospitable in her own way), a clean bed with a white quilt, and a nice little dres-

ser, with many treasures of delft ranged there for "ornament and use." Pictures, coloured and plain, were pasted over the whole walls, and every detail showed a care and neatness not always seen in an Irish cabin. It was wonderful how old Bet escaped being crippled with rheumatism in so damp an abode, but she was almost as well able to dance a jig as any girl at the cross-roads on a summer's evening, although in the corner of her house was a flat stone which she often had to lift to bale out the water which welled up there.

Bet had just lain down to sleep, for she always went to bed when it got dark, and saved her bit of candle for the next morning's work. She had got into her first slumber, when she heard a knock at the door. At first she thought it was some drunken man going home from a fair, but as it went on, she got up and opened a chink to look out.

"Who are you at all, and what do you want at this hour of the night, calling a poor lone woman out of her bed?"

"It's I, Ellen McGarvey. Will you

let me in, Bet, and give me a night's lodging."

"Mercy on us!" cried Bet, "'tis the misthris herself, and she as cold as snow and as weak as a baby, out on the road in the dark. Come in, ma'am, to be sure, and take what I have; 'tis you that are welcome if 'twas a palace."

She hastened to put on her clothes while Corny settled the chair at the fire for his mother. Ellen was hardly seated, when the fatigue of a long day, without a meal, and the excitement and pain she had just gone through, proved too much for her. She made convulsive efforts to unfasten her bonnet and cloak, and then sank back insensible. Corny was terribly frightened, for he had never seen any one faint, but old Bet saw how matters stood, and did not lose her presence of mind. She spread her own shawl on the ground, and said—

"Here now, Corny, lay her down. There isn't a ha'porth on her, poor thing; she'll be well in a minute; loosen her clothes—there now."

Then, going to her supply of water in the corner, she raised the stone and filled a cup with water, which she dashed in Ellen's face. Then she tried a burnt feather, and while Corny hung in an agony of suspense over his poor mother's form, she chafed her hands and feet, encouraging him all the time by telling of the many times she had seen such cases, interspersing her remarks with "Dear, dear, the poor thing; what was it at all brought her to this? Oh, then, he's the cruel man that let her out on foot such a night as this, she that has a right to be nurtured like a lady."

Meanwhile, Corny's gaze was firmly fixed on his mother's face, and at length, after repeated rubbings and douchings, he exclaimed with delight, "Look, Bet, look, her eyelids are moving!" Then came a sigh, a moan, a kind of gasp, and Ellen spoke and tried to sit up, but she had to lie still a little longer. With the first sign of returning consciousness, Bet set about preparing a resting-place for her visitor; she shook up her bed, which was

as neat and clean as could be, and called Corny to help her to undress his mother and lift her into it, having first made preparations for a cup of coffee as soon as she should be settled.

In about half an hour Ellen was almost as strong as before her fainting, and having taken the coffee which Bet had made, and laid down quietly for the night, she said, "Now, Corny, give me one comforting thought that I may sleep this night in gratitude to the Lord for all His tender mercies to me."

"What can I do for you, mother?"

"Say the twenty-third Psalm for me."

Corny repeated it slowly.

"That's my own boy," said Ellen, kissing him affectionately. "Go home now to Nelly, and tell her not to fret, but to keep up her heart and do what she can for the children. Tell her I'm very well now, and comfortable. I have a peace in my heart which the world and the things in it can neither give nor take away; it is, I hope, the peace that Christ gives to His people. Tell her to come to me in the

morning, for I have a great deal to say to her; and above all promise me, for yourself and her, that you will be kind to your father, and make him as happy and comfortable as you can. Make his home cheerful, and coax him by your love and goodness to stay there as much as possible, and keep away from the public-house. Corny, promise me."

"Mother," said Corny, "I hate my father, and I can't bear to see him."

"Do you hate me, my boy?"

"No; I love you with all my heart, and that's why I hate him, for he has no right to treat you this way."

"Well, Corny, if you really love me, you will love him. I love your father with all my heart. It is not himself that is there when he acts as he did to-night, it is the devil who has power over him; he is like a prisoner—a victim who has no power over himself. We should not hate him, but pray for him, and be sorry for him, as we would for one who doesn't know what he's doing. Promise me, Corny, that you will try and do this, and

act towards your father as I would if I were there myself."

"I promise you, mother, I'll try."

"Good-night, my boy. God bless you all."

V.

THE DARKNESS DEEPENS.

ALTHOUGH Ellen intended to sleep that night as soon as she had induced old Bet to get into bed beside her, she found little rest. She was feverish, and disturbed by miserable dreams, so that in the morning she was too weak and stiff and bruised to get up.

As soon as the children had got their breakfast and gone to school, Nelly came to her mother, and pitiful were her lamentations over the state of affairs.

"Oh, mother! what shall I ever do without you? My father is out now, and he won't be home 'till he comes in drunk, to-night. Come home to us, mother,

dear, and you can slip away again at night-fall."

"I would be teaching you a bad lesson, Nelly, darling, if I didn't teach you obedience. 'Tis my duty to do as your father bids, and 'tis yours to obey in both. I will pray day and night that your father's mind may be changed towards me, but till he gives me leave to come home, 'tis the will of God that I should stay here, and not be with you. 'Tis a hard trial, surely, but I thank God I am spared to advise you, and maybe God will see fit some day to bring me home in peace."

"Mother, if my father said I should not see you at all, would you obey him?"

"But God forbid that I should have that sorrow. Did he say anything about it?"

"No; he didn't speak a word at all. He took his hat, sullen-like, and took no more notice of us before he went out than if we were not in the world."

"Did he eat his breakfast?"

"No; I think he must have gone to the public-house."

“ Poor man! poor man! it’s he that has the heavy heart. How true it is that the heart at enmity with God cannot enjoy peace. May the good Lord renew and convert his heart by His Almighty grace. Nelly, every morning you must have breakfast laid the same as if I were there. And get your father’s bread and boiled milk the way he likes it, to tempt him. Be sure you don’t let it get smoked or burnt. Then, before the children go to school, call them and Corny, and have prayers just as when I am at home. Go on reading where I stopped—it was the tenth of Mark the last day—and then pray, and never forget to ask that your father’s heart may be changed by the Holy Spirit of God, and that I may come home.”

“ I don’t think I could pray, mother, like you.”

“ Try, darling, and when you find you can’t, come and let me know.”

“ How long will you stay away ? ”

“ As long as God pleases. ‘ He is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain.’ ”

“Mother, how are we to live?”

“I have been thinking of that. You must not go to school any more, for you'll be wanting at home. Old Bet will go over to you every day and help you in the house-work, she will mind the orchard, too. I have enough saved from the apples to pay the rent this turn, and pay Bet something for living with her. I'll do her work here if she does my work at home. And I'll keep all we make of the orchard to support ourselves. You must try and get something weekly from your father to keep the house going; maybe now he'd save it, as he has it depending on him.”

Then Ellen took from round her neck the key of her green wooden chest, and desired Nelly to choose two pairs of sheets and sundry articles of clothing which she required, and send them later to her in the day by little Maggie and Joe. And, finally impressing upon her the necessity for carefulness and energy in providing for the now motherless family, she sent her home to her charge.

It was a miserable Christmas in the thatcher's home that winter. No Christmas candle was lighted, no holly and ivy stuck into the dresser and hen-coop; but Ellen insisted that her husband's pudding should be made as usual, and actually mixed it herself, and sent it home to Nelly to boil; and Bryan ate it in sullen silence, and asked no questions as to who his cook was. He seldom spoke now. He had quarrelled with the Quirks that first day that Nancy came home with her fatal story-telling, and now, although he kept up for the sake of his own obstinate decision an appearance of cordiality, he frequented their house less constantly. He was not so incessantly muddled as formerly; but he drank just as deeply, and came home often in a reeling condition. Somehow a fortunate idea took possession of his mind, without any special suggestion, that the support of his family depended upon him, and he had the presence of mind to hand Nelly every week a sum of money, varying from seven shillings to ten, with which she always flew to her

mother for advice, as to how she should keep or expend.

So Ellen's little scrapings of orchard money went towards her own and Bet Hanly's expenses, and she made them go far by her industrious needle, making and mending, turning and patching for any who could and would supply her with work.

Her banishment, however, began to be very irksome. Often a great longing took possession of her to be once more in her home, amongst her children. Sometimes she felt a horrid prompting, a kind of walking nightmare, which tempted her to wish that her husband were dead, that no further hindrance might exist between her and her children; but with a great effort she would say, "Get thee behind me, Satan," and stamp out the wicked thought before it began to smoulder within. Once she was tempted to walk within sight of her dreary home, and then came the thought, "What if it should really be all my own fault, after all! He surely thrust me out in a drunken rage, but now,

maybe, he's sorry. And yet men are proud, and won't beg women's pardon; perhaps if I begged his—I'll try." So she took her good old hostess into her confidence, and as they sat over the fire in the chimney corner, she said—

"Do you think himself would like me to go home to him?"

Bet turned round, shading her eyes with her hand and peering into Ellen's face with a searching look, as if to read in it whether she were in her sober senses, or if sorrow had turned her head.

"Like you to go home! is that what you say? Why then, indeed he wouldn't, nor like anything else that's good. Would the evil one like to see an angel from heaven walking in to him?"

"I'm thinking, Bet, I ought to go home and see if he'd let me stay."

"If you do, you'll never come out of his house alive. Bryan McGarvey is a man of his word, and 'tis little thanks you'll get from him for your humility."

"If I could be sure one way or the other that I was doing right."

"I'll tell you what you'll do. Tell Nelly to ask him some time that he's sober, if she ever sees him so, and if there's luck or grace in him he'll tell the poor child that she'll never be another night turning the key in the door of the house, and her mother at the wrong side of it."

This advice quieted Ellen's misgivings, and on the next opportunity she prepared Nelly to apply the test to Bryan McGarvey. Now Nelly was in a constant panic ever since her mother had said that she would implicitly obey her father; lest he, in one of his vagaries, should forbid their precious intercourse, she dared not mention her mother's name. It was a further trial, her having to put the question to him about her mother's return; but having had it hanging over her head for several days, she seized the opportunity one night, when he seemed a little like his old self. He had just given her the weekly money, and looked somewhat good-humoured; so Nelly, with one foot on the ladder which led to the loft where, under the battered

old roof, her and Maggie's little bed was placed, ventured thus far—

“Father, would you let my mother come back? She loves you very much, and is very, very unhappy. Do, dear father.” She half turned to look at him. He sat gazing at the fire, as Ellen had last seen him. He started; his countenance “gathered blackness,” and he thundered out “No!”

Nelly hastened up the ladder.

VI.

WAITING AND WATCHING.

THREE months went by, and four. Ellen waited and watched, and yet there was no change in her condition and prospects; still she hoped against hope. The Rector of the parish came to see her, and then he visited Bryan; but with him his interview was most unsatisfactory; so nothing was effected.

One day Ellen sat knitting stockings for Corny, when she saw little Joe pattering along the Bog-road, beside a man in a frieze coat.

"Mother," said he, "this man wants to speak to you. I came to show him the way."

"You're welcome, sir," said Ellen to the stranger.

"I'm not so sure of that, ma'am," answered the man, placing in her hand a paper; "but I'm obliged to you all the same."

And while Ellen put on her spectacles to look at the strange document, he was gone. It proved to be a summons to the Petty Sessions, on a charge of trespass; but it was not until Joe had run for Corny that Ellen found out the why and wherefore. It seemed the pigstye door had never been mended, and Ellen, not having been on the spot, forgot all about Mr. Melville Hamilton's prudent advice, so the pigs of late had taken several midnight rambles, which extended to that gentleman's plantation.

"Oh, Corny!" said Ellen, "I wonder you did not see to it. And I wonder why they did not summon your father instead of me."

It seemed indeed strange that Ellen should have been the one called upon to answer for irregularities of her household, but thus it happened. Mr. Melville Hamilton, with Grip, his terrier, set off one morning to walk through his farm and grounds, and, joined by Tomkinson, his steward, he made the circuit of his lawn and plantation. They were deep in discussion about sundry changes and improvements which Mr. Hamilton proposed making in his pleasure-grounds, when Grip suddenly cleared the fence, and set off in full cry after some object he discovered there. Mr. Hamilton stepped lightly up on the fence, and put his glass in his eye.

"Just see what that is Grip has got, Tomkinson." Two or three shapeless white things, indistinct to his short sight, were plunging in the distance.

"Pigs, sir; they are McGarvey's pigs, I think."

"That's too bad. Why, look here, Tomkinson, at the mischief they have been doing; they have rooted up the whole of this plantation. Now mind you summon Mrs. McGarvey without delay."

"McGarvey I suppose you mean, sir?"

"No; Mrs. McGarvey, the wife. It's a pity to summon him, for he's always at work. He can't be expected to look after his pigs; but she has nothing else to do."

"She doesn't live at home now, sir."

"Why, how is that? Where is she gone to?"

"They say—but 'tis hard to know the truth of it, sir—that she offended him one day, and he turned her out. I hear things are going all wrong there ever since."

"Well, you may be sure she deserved it, Tomkinson. I never liked that Mrs. McGarvey. I met her on the road some months ago, and she drew her donkey in the very middle of the road, as if it was all her own. I nearly missed the train while I was shouting to her to keep to her own side. At all events it will teach her to look sharp for the future; I remember I

cautioned her that very day about keeping in her pigs. Have her summoned at once; do you hear?"

And so of course Tomkinson did. And moreover he told the whole conversation with his master to his wife, who told it improved and revised to her brother's wife, who gave a third edition with embellishment to a neighbour, from whom Bet Hanly heard it one evening as she was coming home from the mill. In a fury, she returned to her cabin to tell Ellen what Mr. Hamilton had said about her, and found that she had already received the summons, and was prepared for the worst. Poor Ellen was very much hurt at hearing the opinions Mr. Hamilton had so warmly expressed about her; and Bet having vented her rage in a jargon of Irish and English eloquence, set off to ask Mr. Black, the parish clerk (a very "knowledgable" man) to step down and give Mrs. McGarvey some advice as to what her course of conduct now should be, as she said to him, "a poor lone creature that hasn't one to speak for her."

Of course Mr. Black lost no time in coming to see Ellen.

For thirty-five years he had read every Sunday in church in a deep nasal monotone. He never had changed his condition (that of bachelor), nor his habits, nor his residence, within the memory of the neighbourhood. He never gave advice unasked, but in law, physic, or divinity, there was no such authority amongst the neighbours as Mr. Black. Moreover, wherever a clock was to be mended, a machine to be oiled, a tooth to be drawn, or a bone to be set, Mr. Black was the man for the occasion. But, as we have said, he never meddled with those who were given to change. Whatever coincided with his good old-fashioned, long-established views he could advise about and pronounce upon, but departure from the beaten track puzzled and baffled him, and threw all his wits out of gear.

So Mr. Black came down; and as he came he framed the course of advice which he thought it well to give Ellen. He sympathised entirely with her, and in his

own mind had reasoned out her case and turned it round and round; however, she had never asked his direct advice, and he had never volunteered it. But now Bet Hanly had come for him, and conveyed to his mind the impression that Ellen had sent for him, so it behoved him to bring forth the result of his cogitations. With regard to her present dilemma he resolved (for it never occurred to him that she could demur to any of his advice), that she should consult Mr. Pettifog, the attorney in town, a wonderful man of the law, in whose hands no case ever was known to fail. He had a tongue which could accomplish anything he pleased for a friend or against a foe; he should be at once "retained." Mr. Pettifog would not fail to prove an *alibi* for the pigs, and then, when they were made out "not guilty," he would take up Ellen's case and handle it in such a masterly manner that he would carry the court with him, and she should be greeted with acclamations of sympathy, and amidst the public enthusiasm her *persecutors* and *prosecutors* would be nowhere.

All this Mr. Black arranged in his own mind, and when he came he laid his scheme before Ellen. But what was his dismay when, instead of receiving it with delight and submission, she shook her head and said: "Thank you, Mr. Black; I am grateful indeed for your kind advice, but I will not go to Mr. Pettifog. I'll take my chance."

"And what did you bring me here for if it wasn't to advise you? You send for me, and when I come here you have made up your mind without me."

"I believe it was Bet, in her anxiety to help me, that went for you, Mr. Black, and indeed I am thankful to you, but——"

"But you'll lose your only chance; you'll be fined as sure as you're here. Now Mr. Pettifog would prove that your pigs weren't straying at all, and then he'd expose your husband and show how you're treated, and he'd cry down his credit everywhere, and shame him into receiving you."

"That's just what I don't wish," said

Ellen. "In the first place the pigs did get out, Corny says, and 'twould be a lie to say they didn't."

"Why, Mrs. McGarvey, you'll criminate yourself!"

"And isn't it true, Mr. Black?"

"Yes, but you're not bound to be bouncing out with the truth the minute you come into Court."

"I won't have any lies told for me," persisted Ellen, "if 'twas to save my life. And then as for Bryan, I wouldn't blacken him, poor fellow, for all the world could bestow on me."

"Well, you're a queer woman. Isn't it he that's blackening you?"

"God forgive him," said Ellen.

"And how do you intend to get back to your home, as you say you're so anxious to do?"

"However God pleases."

"And are you going to wait for Him?"

"I am."

"You'll wait a long time then."

"How do you know that, Mr. Black?"

"I know that it's nonsense to sit down

and expect God to do a thing, and to do nothing yourself."

"That's what you say, but He says the contrary: 'Tarry thou the Lord's leisure: be strong, and He shall——'"

"I know that; it's one of my verses," said Mr. Black, repeating it with his accustomed church twang; "but what's being 'strong?'"

Ellen smiled, for she could see that by being "his verse," he meant that the reading it devolved upon him in church, but the meaning did not seem to have struck him. "We are told that sometimes our strength is to sit still," said she, "and I think that is my strength now. I have asked the Lord—and He *will* do it—to make things come right for me, and I must wait. He will some day open Bryan's heart, and that is the only way I wish to open Bryan's door."

"I cannot comprehend it," said Mr. Black; then, after a few minutes' pause: "And pray, Mrs. McGarvey, do you think that God listens to the few little words you can string together to ask Him for things?"

“I do indeed; and, moreover, I think He hears my thoughts without my turning them into words at all. There is a language between Christ and His own people that sometimes I think words seem to hinder and interrupt more than anything else. I am a bad hand at explaining things, Mr. Black; but one day I was sitting there, outside the door knitting, when up came Spry, Bet Hanly’s dog. He wanted to get in to warm himself at the fire, so he made two springs at the half-door, but he couldn’t get over it, so he stopped considering the door, and he fixed his eyes on my face. Whenever I looked up, he’d give a little gentle whine and look towards the door. He spoke plainer than I’m speaking to you: sometimes he’d give me a little stroke of his paw to make me mind him. Well, I thought I’d see whether he’d forget it, so I knitted on, and took no notice. But no, there were his two eyes fixed on my face, waiting and watching, saying, ‘I know you’ll do it; you can’t help doing it.’ At last I could stand it no longer, I got up and opened

the door. That's the way, now, that I am looking to God to open Bryan's heart: *I can't do it, but He can and will, and so I'm waiting and watching.*"

"I think you might do better than liken yourself to a dog, Mrs. McGarvey."

"Our Saviour's best words were spoken to her who likened herself to a dog: 'O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.' I want no more than that."

As Mr. Black sauntered home with his hands under his coat-tails, and eyes on the ground, kicking a stone before him in an absent manner, he fell into a deep meditation, for the startling thought forced itself upon him that there was a subject upon which he was not the best-informed man in the world.



VII.

HER REVENGE.

THE Court day came round, and Ellen duly presented herself. She was very nervous, never before having been in a court of justice. Before she left home she threw Bet Hanly into a paroxysm of lamentation over her "elegant" cloth cloak, by requesting her to look upon it for the last time. Be it known to the reader that this word "elegant" has a most comprehensive meaning in the mouths of Irish country-folk. It expresses size, warmth, durability, and other qualities.

Ellen's *elegant* cloak was condemned to be sacrificed. For she could not shut her eyes to the certain prospect of having to pay a penalty which must fall heavily on her little savings, so she resolved to raise thirty shillings on her cloak at the pawn-office, and spend ten on substituting for

it a coarse dark brown shawl which would still keep her decent looking.

She was called upon to answer the charge brought against her, and pleaded guilty without extenuation, so the heaviest fine was imposed. To her utter astonishment, however, a friend whom she recognised as Mr. Black stepped forward, and insisted, as a favour, upon being allowed to pay the amount.

"Thank you, sir," said she afterwards, when they met outside, "I did not expect this great kindness; I hope to be able very soon to pay you this debt, but you have saved my cloak from the pawn-office, which is a great relief." Great was Bet's joy when the relief was made known to her, and many the blessings she poured on good Mr. Black's timely generosity.

We must now pass over a long period in Ellen's life, during which nothing particular occurred. She saw the children every day, and managed her household after a fashion by deputy. Summer came and departed—Michaelmas fled by. The

apples were gathered and sold, and a twelvemonth (what a long, weary year it was!) of "watching and waiting" had nearly elapsed, when one evening she heard outside the cabin-door an altercation in loud whispers going on between Bet and some one whom she soon found out to be Nancy Quirk.

"I tell you," said the latter, "my father told me to call her and tell her to hurry up before he dies." Ellen started and shivered.

"Why, then, let him die, and don't be worriting her, poor soul," answered Bet; "'tis trouble enough he brought her; may it soon be ended!"

"What's the matter Bet?" said Ellen, staggering to the door, "tell me quick, is it one of the children?"

"No, but Bryan McGarvey," answered Nancy. "The ladder fell on him, and I don't know but he's killed entirely."

Indeed it was hard even for a doctor to say how terribly Bryan had been injured, for he lay insensible, bruised and shattered, on the kitchen floor at Quirk's.

The heavy rain which had lately fallen was supposed to have loosened the earth and stones of an embankment outside a neighbour's house which he was employed in thatching. His ladder rested against a large stone which formed part of the embankment, but this accidentally gave way, and the ladder slipped hopelessly down into a steep hole.

In vain Bryan clutched at the roof as he felt himself going down. If he had been sober some presence of mind might have saved him, but as it was his efforts only made things worse ; he contrived to twist himself on the ladder, so that it fell upon his right leg and crushed it most frightfully.

We cannot describe Ellen's feelings when she came to her husband, and still less when she crossed for the first time the threshold of her home, and felt herself again a wife and a mother. Bryan was alive, and she was with her children.

When Bryan came to himself—he had been in an almost continuous faint until he was placed in his bed—he looked at

her first in a bewildered way, and then said, "Wife, are you with me?" He used to call her "wife" in their young married days; then he cooled down to "Ellen," and latterly when he spoke he never called her by any name.

"I'm here, Bryan."

"Give me a drink of water."

This was their reconciliation.

Happy days followed for Ellen. She had not much rest, but she had peace beyond what she could have asked or thought. She never left her husband's side. He suffered tortures, but they were bodily, not mental. And what was the pain of seeing him thus prostrated to the misery of seeing him sin! Bryan was a changed man. His nature seemed changed. He was gentle and tractable, and every day showed Ellen that a work had begun within, which even in her most sanguine moments she had not hoped for. Mr. Black often came to see him, and to Ellen's astonishment Bryan one day asked her if she would send a message to his old

schoolfellow Bob Brady, asking him to come out and pay him a visit. He came, and they had a long private talk, the particulars of which she never inquired into. It was a joyful Christmas for the children. Corny and Nelly no longer felt terrified or afraid to speak to their father, and even in the midst of his pain the demon of ill-temper seemed to have departed.

Months went by, and as the days lengthened Bryan left his bed, and was able to come to the kitchen fireplace.

It was in the month of May that Ellen came one morning to her husband's bedside. She wanted to say something, but hesitated.

"Bryan," said she at last, "Nelly is growing a fine clever girl."

"That she is, indeed," said Bryan, "nearly as clever as yourself."

"And Corny is very strong," added Ellen.

"He's a fine lad. May he never be like his father!" sighed Bryan.

"What would you say," said Ellen, "if I left you with them for a month?"

They'd take the same care of you that I do myself."

"Wife, I couldn't spare you," said Bryan; "where do you want to go?"

"The way is this," said Ellen. "Poor Mr. Melville Hamilton came home last week from the Philipstown races very ill, and 'twas only yesterday Doctor Stoney found out he has a very bad kind of small-pox. They have sent in all directions for a nurse-tender, and can't get one. They telegraphed to Dublin, but the hospitals are full of patients, and they can't spare a nurse. I want you to let me go up and offer to take care of him."

A long pause followed.

"Wife, if I say no, will you go in spite of me?"

"No, Bryan; you must say Go, or I won't move. But God has been very good to the two of us, and if He has called me to do this, 'tis little enough to do towards showing my gratitude."

"But if you took the sickness and died?"

"If He sends me, He can keep me; my

life is in His hands, wherever I am. I hope I can say, 'To live is Christ, and to die will be gain.' The Saviour whom I trust, and through whom my sins are forgiven, will do all things well."

"Well, wife, I can't spare you: you must not go. Put it out of your head, and get me my breakfast."

Ellen went off cheerfully and prepared her husband's breakfast. When she came back to give it to him, he was reading his Testament. He looked disturbed and unwilling to talk, so she did not speak, but having settled his breakfast near him, and tenderly lifted him and pinned a shawl round his shoulders and raised his pillows, she was going away, when he said, pointing to a verse in the chapter before him, "Read that."

She read—"But he that loseth his life for My sake, the same shall find it."

"Ellen," continued he, "I sent you away for twelve long months for my own wickedness, and now I can't spare you for one month for the Saviour's sake, who has had mercy on us. Go, in the name of

God, and do whatever He may put into your heart to do, for the poor young man maybe is on his death-bed."

"I'll go, Bryan."

In two hours more Ellen's preparations were completed. She dressed herself in a cotton gown, and took some few necessities in her hand in a bundle. She sent Nelly down to Bet Hanly's, her old quarters, with her second suit of clothes, for there she intended to perform quarantine before she should come home again, and having given directions for the management of all in her absence, which she calculated would last a month, she started for the grand house of sickness.

A drearier mansion could not be described. Ellen had been there before, but it was then full of company; every sight and sound betokened life and occupation; to-day it was as a city of the dead. Blinds were down, windows were shut, all was silent, dark, and solitary. She thought it better not to startle the invalid by ringing the great hall-door bell, so she

went round the house by a walk which led to a side porch. Here she rang and knocked many times without getting an answer; and at last she summoned up courage to turn the handle and walk into the hall. Nobody seemed at home. She waited, and looked upstairs and through the passages, and almost meditated going away, when in one of the rooms on the right-hand side she heard some slight movement. She knocked in vain at the door, and at last ventured to put in her head. An old lady sat by the fire, before which a pair of sheets was hung to air; she did not turn round when Ellen entered, but Ellen recognised her as old Miss Skipton, who had been housekeeper in Mr. Hamilton's family until she had grown too deaf and blind and infirm for the post. She walked up to Miss Skipton's chair, and touched her shoulder. With a great start she turned round and closely surveyed Ellen.

"Who are you?" said she. "And where do you come from?"

"I am Ellen McGarvey, ma'am—the

thatcher's wife—and I live on the Bog-road. We heard that a nurse-tender was wanting for Mr. Hamilton, and I have come to say I would take care of him if I can be of any use."

This was the substance of Ellen's explanation, but she had to call it out and change her words many times to make her hearer, if such the old lady could be called, understand.

At last Miss Skipton seemed to comprehend, and she said: "Well, my dear, I never saw you before, but 'twas the Son of God that sent you here to-day in our distress. Here am I, a helpless old creature, and Fowler the butler, the only ones left in the house; the servants all fled away as soon as they heard the name of the sickness: cook and housemaids, footmen and all are gone, and there isn't one to do a hand's turn for us. Fowler is up in the poor master's room now, but I doubt if he's any good there; I take it he's a better hand at drawing corks than settling a sick man's pillows. I'll call him."

Miss Skipton rose heavily from her

chair with difficulty, so that Ellen had to go forward to help her; but she accomplished the performance herself.

"Thank you, my dear; you see I'm getting old—rheumatics and dropsy. I don't know what I'm left alive for, but maybe 'tis better to have me here than nobody this sorrowful day."

She groped along the wall until she found a bell-rope, by which a loud peal rang upstairs. In a few minutes a quick creaking footstep was heard in the passages overhead, and the next moment a little old man, with a bald head and a very red nose, came ambling into the room. "Well, Miss Skipton! what is it, ma'am, what is it? I came as fast as I could; I'm sure I don't know how I'm to attend the two of you, only if the poor master doesn't soon get a turn he won't long be a burden to us." This was of course a soliloquy, as Miss Skipton could not hear.

She was aware, however, of Mr. Fowler's presence, and before his speech was ended she began to introduce Ellen.

"This young person, Mr. Fowler, has

been kind enough to——” Here she seemed to forget or misunderstand what Ellen had told her, so she herself finished the explanation. She was warmly welcomed by Mr. Fowler, who said he knew her husband. (Ellen feared their acquaintance must have been formed in the not very creditable circle who met at Quirk’s, but she did not allude to this.) He asked kindly for Bryan, and whether he knew anything of her accepting this post of danger, and having heard that she had come with his full consent, he asked her to follow him upstairs.

The house to Ellen was ghostly in its grandeur; not a sound to be heard but Mr. Fowler’s creaky boots as he ambled through the passages and halls. He could not, even in the sad circumstances which surrounded them, and the presence of disease and sickness, perhaps unto death, forget that Ellen had never seen the house before, and must of course be greatly struck with its magnificence; so he made himself a kind of showman, and insisted on her walking through the draw-

ing-rooms, looking at the pictures, admiring the proportions of the dining-room, the painted ceiling in the hall, and the carved oak wainscoting in the library, while her thoughts were busy with the miserable owner of them all, who was probably lying on a bed of agony, unattended, compared with which in his present circumstances a stretcher in the workhouse Infirmary would have been luxury. After several hints that she thought they ought not to lose time in going to his master, Mr. Fowler, who thought her a person of very mean perceptions and deficient taste, in not having been much more impressed with all he had shown her, ushered Ellen into the sick room.

The sight that met her was not overdrawn in her previous fancy. In a large curtained bed, surrounded with every contrivance that money and art could devise for comfort and convenience, moaned the poor invalid. He did not know what was the matter, or who were with him. His face was one distorted mass of disease,

and his eyes were blinded. Windows were shut, the fire was out, the bed, loaded with clothes (to say nothing of a grand silk quilted cover lined with down), kept up the fever that maddened him.

Ellen remembered some of the precautions she had learned to guard against infection, but the heavy smell of sickness almost overcame her on coming out of the pure air. She had eaten a good meal before she left home, and now she took out of her little bag a bottle of vinegar and a sponge, with which she moistened her hands and face and damped her handkerchief. She drew back the curtains of the bed and opened the window-sash, closing the shutters to keep out the light; then, standing between the window and the bed, she noticed how uncomfortably the poor patient was lying; she lightened his bed-clothes, and with Mr. Fowler's help straightened his crumpled-up sheets; she lifted him gently, as many a time she had done Bryan, and turned and beat up his burning pillows, and when all was done she sent Mr. Fowler for materials to

light the fire, while she washed her hands and face, to remove any danger from contact with the poisonous bed.

Fortunately the doctors had not arrived when Ellen came, and she was able to get all these little things done before she heard their carriage crunching the gravel. They were surprised and delighted to find her there.

"His life depends on the care he gets, and he has been getting none," said Doctor Stoney (it was he that attended Bryan). "But how does McGarvey spare you?"

"He's getting on finely, sir, and the children know how to mind him as well as myself."

"Well, give this poor fellow" (a nod at the bed) "as good minding as you gave your husband, and you'll have the saving of his life."

"What do you think of him, doctor?"

"I don't think anything. 'Tis as heavy a case as ever we saw, but as he was without any one to mind him, he couldn't have lived; now he has a chance."

Then the doctors told Ellen how they

had telegraphed for Mr. Hamilton's mother and sister, who were on the Continent, but the shock was too much for the old lady, and she had been seized with paralysis on her way through London and could not come; "so now," they added, "you are a kind of mistress of the house, and we leave everything in your hands; the old woman downstairs is childish, and Fowler is scarcely less so."

"If I could have my old woman, Bet Hanly, here to attend me and go up and downstairs for me, I'd get on well enough, Doctor Stoney."

"A capital thought," said the doctor, "we'll call and send her up."

So the doctors went away, leaving Ellen full directions as to how to manage the patient until their return. Bet Hanly came up, and Mr. Fowler built up a warm bed for her in Mr. Hamilton's dressing-room, while Ellen's resting-place was an easy chair by the side of his bed.

There was little change for nearly a fortnight. Ellen sometimes went down to the housekeeper's room for a change of

air ; but generally Bet was her messenger to and fro, and brought up her meals ; whenever Ellen left the room Bet watched. Every morning and evening, as Ellen looked at the face that ten days ago was a handsome one, now a swollen mass of sores, she prayed that the sightless eyes might see again, and that the Sun of Righteousness might also rise with healing in His wings upon the darkened and sin-diseased soul, giving him to see his lost estate, and the way in which he could obtain forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus Christ.

At last the happy day came when the doctors pronounced the case hopeful. His pulse went down and fever abated, and soon the strange doctor's attendance slackened, and even Doctor Stoney came more seldom.

Before he could look at her Mr. Hamilton was anxious to know who it was that was always at his bedside watching every stir, and attending to every want of his. Ellen told her name, and how she happened to be there. Often

they had long talks, when the patient was strong enough.

“What are you doing, Mrs. McGarvey?”

“Reading, sir.”

“Read it aloud.”

And then she would read for her patient things out of the Bible, which were known to her so that they had become living realities, part of her very life, but of which he had before scarcely so much as heard.

Any one who has had a dangerous illness, shut out from all the world in a kind of solitary confinement, knows the value of a kind and faithful nurse; one who will talk and cheer the lonely hours, and keep silence and be still when rest is necessary.

Mr. Hamilton deplored Ellen's going away, as if he were losing an old friend. He would not hear of her going back to her family until she had spent a fortnight at the sea in comfortable lodgings, which he provided for her.

“I cannot repay you, Mrs. McGarvey,”

he said one day, "but I can never forget you."

And Ellen could see that he meant what he said, and that moment she was better paid than if he had given her a part of his estates.

The penitence of Mr. Hamilton was ardently sincere, and even intense. It was a true godly sorrow. By the teaching of the Holy Spirit he saw himself condemned by the law of God; but turning to the Gospel he beheld God reconciling the world to Himself, through the mediation of His Son. The truth that whosoever believeth in Christ, whatever his former course of life, should not perish, but obtain everlasting life, was applied with power; and his future years showed that he had not received the grace of God in vain. Blessed affliction, that was the means of leading him to devote his life to the service of virtue and piety!

VIII.

“ONE WORD MORE.”

WE called a short time ago, as an old friend, to see the McGarveys. Bryan looked wonderfully well, although he never again can mount a ladder.

He sits in the chimney-corner in winter, and at the house-door in summer. He makes baskets now, which is an amusement to him.

Corny and Nelly were not there. The former has been sent by Mr. Hamilton to Glasneven agricultural school, and he says, when his course is ended, he will take him into his own permanent employment. Nelly was gone to live with Lady Maria, Mr. Hamilton's mother, in London, and is as happy as the days are long.

Mr. Melville Hamilton is a great deal away from home, but he never comes back that he does not visit Ellen, and

bring some new device which he thinks would be a comfort to Bryan. He has had their house newly roofed, and is most thoughtful in his attention to them.

While I was at the McGarveys, I noticed Maggie dragging about a great lump of a child, whose grey eyes and broad features contrasted very strongly with those of the mother whom it condescended to notice, every now and then, in rather a troublesome manner.

She was a pale, worn-out young woman, with bright hair and a mild, pretty face.

She was evidently far gone into consumption, and her cough, as she sat in an easy chair opposite Bryan, came on in paroxysms which were most distressing.

"Who is that young woman?" we asked, as Ellen walked with me a bit of the way on the road home.

"Don't you remember her?" said she, "our niece, poor Jemima Harpur. She isn't long for this world, and has come to us to end her troubled life in quietness and peace."

Then Ellen told me Jemima's history.

After the offence Ellen's plain speaking had given Mrs. Stephens no communication took place between them. Mr. Harpur was made more of than ever, and his proposal accepted with delight.

Poor Mrs. Stephens resorted to every known expedient to raise money for Jemima's bridal dress, and she laid out the sum she contrived to scrape together in a most ridiculous manner: evening finery, lace pocket-handkerchief, and mock jewellery, she looked upon as the indispensables of a "leedy's" outfit. The affair came off with as great a flourish as they could possibly accomplish. As the drudge said, in writing home to her mother, Miss Stephens "was marred, and had a great wedin."

The mother insisted on their taking a honeymoon trip to Killarney, which soon cleared out their little balance. Then they returned to the genteel misery of the maternal home.

Very soon Mrs. Stephens began to feel the unpleasantness of having a new member in their family circle whose irregular

mode of living was a constant drag upon their little resources. Mr. Harpur ate, drank, and was merry, so far as she could supply them, but if things were not quite equal to his ideas of comfort he made no hesitation about complaining, and went off to his old quarters at the inn — then he would come home at all hours very much the worse for his entertainment at the bar.

The little ready money was rapidly exhausted, and Mrs. Stephens obliged to borrow in all directions and obtain credit wherever she could to maintain her household, while she watched eagerly for the first instalment of the liberal allowance Mr. Harpur promised to make her. Jemima was instructed to throw out some gentle hints, which were received in anything but a dutiful manner, and did not evoke Mr. Harpur's blessings on the establishment; but when she tremblingly told her mother, she said it was quite natural that a gentleman of Mr. Harpur's rank in life should not understand the economy they were obliged to practise. Sometimes

Mr. Harpur went away for a time, varying, according to his commercial business, from three to ten days, and then returned to his new home. Still there was no sign of his promised contribution to the family sustentation fund.

At length he announced his intention of making a more extended tour, saying his "house" expected their agents to do so twice in a year. Jemima waved her dear Harpur a tearful adieu as he arranged his professional portmanteaus and bags on an outside car, and tucked round his legs a showy railway rug on which a gigantic tiger was portrayed. She never saw him again.

They waited in vain for his return. They wrote to the house in London for which he acted as agent, and received only a short note to say that Mr. Harpur had been dismissed, for gross negligence with regard to his employers' interest, nine months previously. This must have been before their marriage, and he had been deceiving them ever since.

Poor Mrs. Stephens never got over the

shock. Creditors pressed for payment, and she had an execution sale of her little property, and was forced to move with Jemima into a wretched lodging, where Ellen found them when she went to answer a note from Jemima, received soon after her return from the sea-side.

The note was written in a pale, pointed, crowquill hand.

“DEAR AUNT,

“You were always kind to us. Will you forgive the past and visit us now? You will find us on the third landing, 42, Dale Street.

“Your affectionate Niece,
“JEMIMA HARPUR.”

It was not in Ellen's nature to refuse the request.

Even on her death-bed Mrs. Stephens's ruling passion was strong. She would not see her sister-in-law until her old false teeth were after a fashion adjusted, and the wreck of what was once her dress cap stuck upon her head, an old shawl

pinned across her shoulders, as she sat in bed propped up with pillows, with an imitation cameo brooch.

She did not live long after this interview, but Ellen eased her troubled mind by promising to take poor declining Jemima home with her, and be a guardian to the baby who had entered life in these wretched circumstances.

Ellen tells me that yesterday as Jemima was watching young Maggie playing with her child, she said:

“Aunt, I do not wish Minnie to be brought up as a *lady*.”

“My dear,” said her aunt, “she shall be my own child.”

“That’s enough,” said Jemima; and she went to sleep.



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